

Citrus, Fruit & Vegetable Standardization and Federal-State Inspection

Arizona ranks third in the nation for production of fresh market vegetables. Arizona acreage produced more than 100 million cartons of fresh produce. Arizona's top five commodities rank second nationally and account for almost 70 percent of the State's total produce production. The top ten commodities based on carton count for fiscal year 2005 are as follows:

Head lettuce	29,606,492	Watermelon	4,342,000
Romaine	15,887,174	Spinach	4,224,371
Cantaloupe	13,223,457	Cauliflower	3,454,890
Broccoli	5,852,116	Honeydew	2,916,533
Leaf lettuce	5,716,031	Spring Mix	2,411,786

As detailed below, the Citrus, Fruit and Vegetable Standardization Program and the Federal-State Inspection Program conducted 69,526 inspections this year. In addition, the Citrus, Fruit and Vegetable Standardization Program issued 479 licenses to the produce industry.

Industry Funded -- Industry Supported

Both of these programs are entirely self-funded and receive no general fund allocations. Industry supports the Citrus, Fruit and Vegetable Standardization Program through license fees and carton assessments, which are reviewed monthly and adjusted yearly. The Federal-State Inspection Program is entirely funded on a fee-for-service basis.

The Citrus, Fruit and Vegetable Advisory Council, by statute, is comprised of governor-appointed citrus producers from specified counties, fruit or vegetable producers from specified counties, an iceberg lettuce producer from Yuma County, an Arizona grape producer and an Arizona apple producer. This group of leaders of their respective industries meets quarterly with staff of the Citrus, Fruit and Vegetable Program to review program policy and budgetary items.

Standardization Program

Arizona citrus, fruit and vegetable producers rely on the Arizona Department of Agriculture for increasing the potential for domestic and international marketing and protecting against exporting, importing and selling of substandard produce by development and enforcement of uniform standards. It is the Citrus, Fruit and Vegetable Standardization Program (CF&V) that assists the Arizona produce industry, including growers, shippers, contract packers, dealers and commission merchants in complying with product quality standards.

The Citrus, Fruit and Vegetable Standardization Program maintains the product quality standards established for each commodity produced or marketed in Arizona. Program inspections are conducted to verify quality (such as color, shape and condition factors, bruising and decay), size, maturity, processing and labeling. These inspections take place in fields, packinghouses, coolers and warehouses.

Because of the CF&V Program, the Arizona produce industry has the quality control necessary for the marketing of their products.

Arizona industry produces an immense variety of citrus, fruits and vegetables available to consumers throughout the year. Citrus, Fruit and Vegetable Program inspectors check for various factors in that citrus, for example, is tested for maturity and size, which is important to shippers. Grapes and melons are tested for ripeness and sugar content. All vegetables and fruits are inspected for defects such as scars or irregularities of shape, which is important for customer appeal.

Federal-State Inspection Program

This year the Citrus, Fruit and Vegetable Standardization Program successfully completed its ninth year managing the Federal-State Inspection Service Fresh Produce Inspection and Terminal Market Programs in Nogales, Phoenix, and Yuma under a cooperative agreement with United States Department of Agriculture. Mandatory as well as voluntary, United States Department of Agriculture inspections are performed by Arizona Department of Agriculture staff (federal-state inspectors) and take place primarily at the shipping point (point of origin), port-of-entry (Arizona-Mexico border) or the terminal market (point of destination).

This federal program administered by the department also enforces United States import requirements and marketing order restrictions at the international border between Arizona and Mexico. Significantly, Nogales, Arizona is the second busiest port-of-entry for produce in the United States. Last year, department staff inspected more than 14 million packages of tomatoes and 17.6 million lugs of table grapes imported from Mexico; and a variety of other commodities including watermelons, peppers, cucumbers, squash, onions and citrus.

It is important to note that the Citrus, Fruit and Vegetable Program and the Shipping Point Inspection Program in Yuma and Phoenix developed cost-reduction efficiencies for Arizona's agriculture industries through the cross-training of department inspectors to handle both state and federal inspections as well as phytosanitary certifications.

Third Party Audit Program Created

At the request of Arizona fresh produce industry representatives, Arizona Department of Agriculture, along with other western State Departments of Agriculture and the United States Department of Agriculture, developed a Third Party Audit Program within the existing framework of USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Federal -State Inspection. The resulting program is designed to audit the Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices for the produce industry. Federally licensed state inspectors perform these audits at industry's request.

Department Pride in the Statewide Gleaning Project

Governor Janet Napolitano has issued an Executive Order extending the Arizona Statewide Gleaning Project. Gleaning is the harvesting of surplus crops and the Governor's Project distributes these gleaned crops to those in need. The Arizona Department of Agriculture plays an integral role in the statewide gleaning effort in that Citrus, Fruit and Vegetable Standardization Program inspectors notify key food bank officials of upcoming seasons and identify potential crop donations. Participating producers are then able to donate surplus crops instead of discarding them by allowing volunteers, inmate labor and food bank staff to glean their fields. Several state agencies support other portions of the program and this combined effort resulted in over 20 million pounds of produce collected and distributed to food banks and other organizations serving those in need during this past year.